May 2015 No 105

ON TRACK OFF ROAD

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First Grand Prix victory for Team Standing Construct Yamaha Valentin Guillod.

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MXGP

To perfection...

Talavera de la Reina brings its own character to the FIM Motocross World Championship but many of the Grand Prix stars would say the narrow, winding layout is not the best for racing. Those shallow hills do allow the MXGP elite to show off their full athleticism on the motorcycle though. Check out Rockstar Suzuki Clement Desalle's feet and body position with barely inches to spare

Photo by Ray Archer

Back on the limit...

Jorge Lorenzo doing his thing and notching a MotoGP hat-trick at Jerez after previous wins in 2010 and 2011. The Spaniard turned 28 just after the fourth round of eighteen in MotoGP and the manner of his mastery at the famous circuit indicates that a spike in form in coming after a questionable 2014

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Uncatchable...

Our cover star Jonathan Rea is decimating World Superbike this year in his first term on the works Kawasaki. A repeat of his 2014 double at Imola was taken on the green bike this time and the grid are wondering how the Northern Irishman's momentum can be stopped. Rea now has an 87 point lead after five events, eight wins from ten and has been on the podium with the drop of every flag

Photo by Graeme Brown/GeeBee Images

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VICTORY

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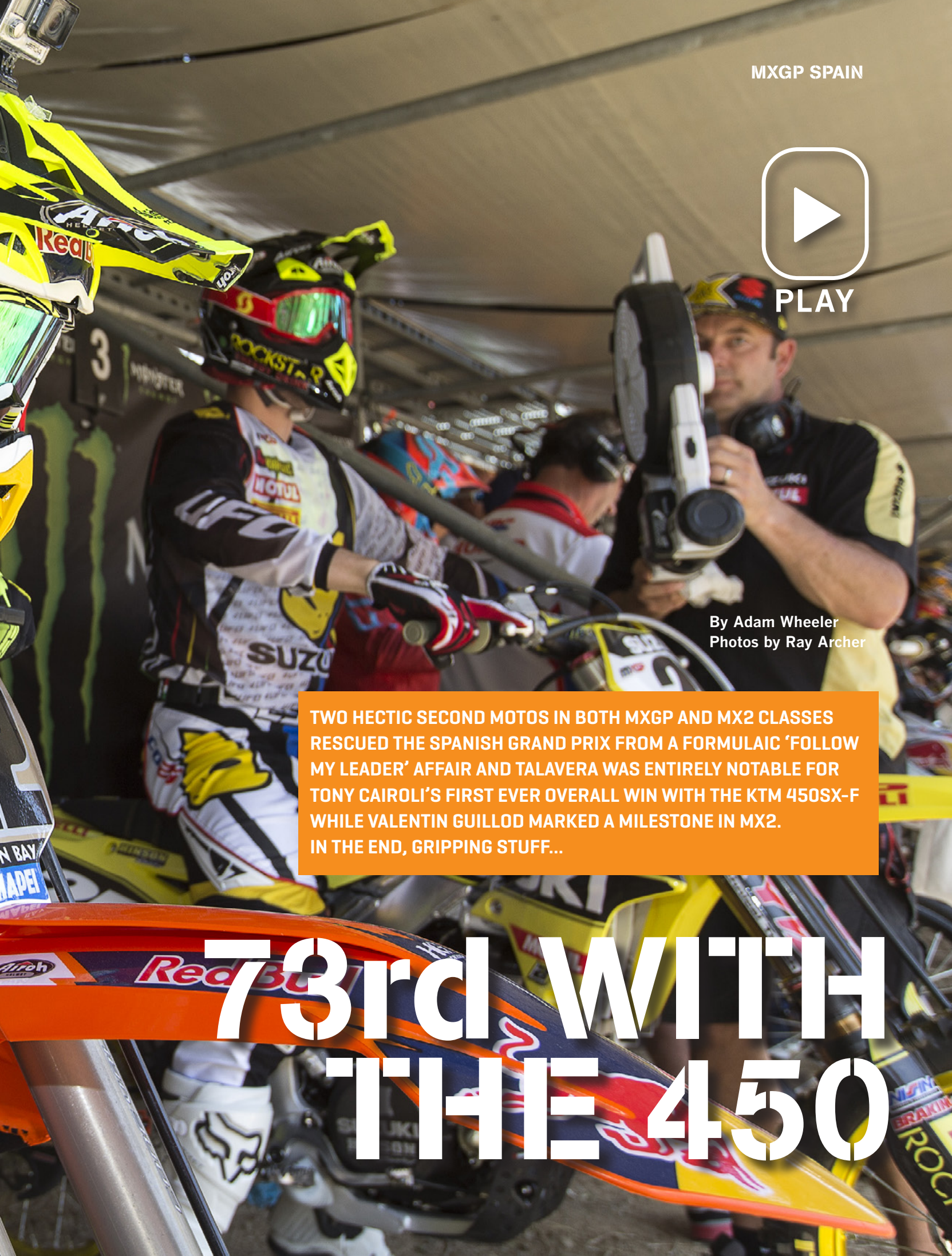
MX

GRAND PRIX OF SPAIN

TALAVERA DE LA REINA · MAY 10th · Rnd 6 of 18

MXGP winner: Tony Cairoli, KTM
MX2 winner: Valentin Guillod, Yamaha



PLAY

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

TWO HECTIC SECOND MOTOS IN BOTH MXGP AND MX2 CLASSES RESCUED THE SPANISH GRAND PRIX FROM A FORMULAIC 'FOLLOW MY LEADER' AFFAIR AND TALAVERA WAS ENTIRELY NOTABLE FOR TONY CAIROLI'S FIRST EVER OVERALL WIN WITH THE KTM 450SX-F WHILE VALENTIN GUILLOD MARKED A MILESTONE IN MX2. IN THE END, GRIPPING STUFF...

73rd WITH THE 450

Talavera de la Reina, the hard-pack home of the Spanish Grand Prix for the second year in a row, might be renowned for its ceramic industry but there was no hint of a crack in Tony Cairoli's veneer for this sixth outing of eighteen in MXGP this season. We carried the first comments by the World Champion on his decision to sever a five year/title winning streak with the works KTM 350SX-F in favour of the new king of the segment the AMA Championship owning 2016 450SX-F on the website on Friday prior to the Grand Prix. There is little doubt that KTM have forged a motorcycle that elite athletes are now using to win races on a regular basis and Cairoli admitted to extensive winter testing with the pre-production model – the standard version of which will be shown in public for the first time in Italy in two weeks time. To many it seemed a risky move and one that quite a few observers in the Media Centre at Talavera believed had come about through Cairoli realising he would somehow need to 'up' his game to match Clement Desalle for starts and consistency and Max Nagl for outright speed.

Cairoli spoke of a different style needed for the slightly bigger bike. He said on Saturday of using "other muscles" and of getting quite tired through the Qualification Heat. During the first moto on Sunday when he ran to a lonely third position behind Nagl (now a winner of 50% of the races this year) and Desalle he joked later that his arms felt "longer than normal" after three laps. 222 was definitely no slouch and had the torque and variation on the corner speed approach (that he nailed so well on the 350) sorted by the time of the second race.

His 3-1 was significant in a number of ways. It was an emotional first victory of 2015 and made him the fourth different MXGP winner in six rounds. Talavera was also the last time that his father Benedetto saw him compete in 2014 before his unexpected and sudden death. For KTM it brought the 450SX-F to the top step for the first time in five years, even though Cairoli had used the 2013 version of the machine in a one-off ride to second place behind Shaun Simpson at the Grand Prix of Benelux that season. He shared points with Max Nagl – ironically the last 450SX-F victor back in 2010 – but the German's third place in the second moto meant that Cairoli drank from the GoPro mounted winner's champagne on this occasion. The fact that Clement Desalle went 2-5 after a flip over the bars starting the second lap of the second moto and missed the podium for the first time in 2015 (he was fourth overall) gave Nagl the added bonus of extending his degree of comfort with the red plate to twelve points.

Desalle's crash came shortly after a first corner tumble that took down Todd Waters and Gautier Paulin – the Grand Prix of Europe conqueror was left ruing his starts again in Spain – and livened up the MXGP contest after a static first moto. A roughening track helped, even if the MXGP riders complained again of the strange bumps and lines caused by a total of five racing classes in action thanks to the relentless European Championship support card.

Part of the drama of the second dash was thanks to Yamaha's Romain Febvre; unquestionably one of the standout athletes of 2015 so far in his rookie term in the premier division. The way the Frenchman attacked the terrain and set lap-times nearly two seconds faster than anybody else in the opening stages was almost breathtaking. He glided past Nagl and relegated Cairoli by lap three to then set the pace for the first time for another five circulations. It was a shame he briefly stalled the bike (but used Yamaha's prototype electric start to get going again) that gave Cairoli the impetus to close and eventually regain the lead. Febvre went 4-2 on the day for a deserved first trophy in MXGP and joins the list of riders since 2007 who have come into the factory team and had an immediate impact; names like Coppins, Philippaerts, Frossard and Van Horebeek (the Belgian was due to have a cast removed from his broken foot yesterday, Monday).

MXGP SPAIN

Guillod shows the effect of rigorous testing and development work on a motorcycle can finally bring. If the Swiss can start like he did in the second moto for the remainder of the season then expect a fresh MX2 threat

The way HRC's Evgeny Bobryshev is going about his resurrection in MXGP is suitably quiet and effective and here he was a lingering presence on the fringe of the rostrum, eventually taking fifth overall. At some point the Russian is going to explode onto a higher level of form and is building up his confidence.

It was a weird day for the Brits just two weeks before MXGP moves to Matterley Basin in southern England. Shaun Simpson endured problems with his suspension configuration, a goggle malfunction and then another broken rear brake in the first moto – hardly ideal for the Talavera hills. He finally shook free of the glitches to ride to a very decent sixth place in the second moto and stuck to within two seconds of Desalle. Brand-mate Tommy Searle only lasted minutes of the same moto as he crashed on the same leap that claimed Desalle. The former triple world championship runner-up was going for a scan on a painful shoulder Monday morning.

In truth MXGP was eclipsed by MX2 for entertainment value. Herlings ran to his sixth Pole Position in a row on Saturday and then his ninth win (from eleven) in the first moto, while being closely shadowed by Max Anstie. The Kawasaki rider admitted that he kept some energy in reserve while chasing the KTM and without really showing 84 a wheel for the lead. He might have made a mistake with his strategy because in the second moto a poor start saw him on the gas to fight back to ninth place and he ultimately lost a decent shout of a first 2015 podium in the last two laps.

Dylan Ferrandis had already pulled out of the first moto and there was some confusion as to whether he'd crashed – he didn't mention any accident in post-race comments – or suffered a collision because the rear end of his KX250F was decidedly ragged and his rear brake was destroyed. The Frenchman was fresh for the second sprint and immediately hit the front but did not have the conviction of Valentin Guillod. The Swiss finally seems to be finding a desirable set-up on the YZ250F from the Standing Construct awning and through a mountain of development the team have undertaken since turning Blue in the winter. He stalked and probed Ferrandis for the entire moto while Anstie, Tim Gajser and Herlings – who had crashed spectacularly and came to the post-race press conference with red marks over his face and head – gained ground through the pack and on the best state for overtaking the narrow track had been in all weekend. Guillod made his move two laps before the flag and this demoted the consistent form of Jordi Tixier to the third step and Herlings' trek back to seventh was the basis for a remarkable recovery to the top three; it was miraculous that he was not badly hurt.

After Gajser in Italy Guillod became the second first-time GP victor this season and the second likeable Swiss to win a Grand Prix this century after Arnaud Tonus in 2014. "Since I was a kid I said 'I want to win a GP one day'," he smiled. "Arnaud did it before me but that's life! I'm the next Swiss guy to win and I'm really happy to put my name on the list."

In the busy European Championship fixtures the EMX250 contest swung back into the favour of Maxime Desprey after Adam Sterry's double in Holland two weeks previously. The Brit started badly and could only register 11-3 to lose the red plate to his French rival. Yentel Martens is still the fastest two-stroke racer in EMX300 and Jorge Prado enjoyed a close spat with Kiwi Josiah Natzke to earn his very first EMX125 victory and give the Spanish fans reason to cheer.

100%
PLAY

Consistency again from Nagl who once more showed that Saturday's work bleed nicely into results for Sunday. Tommy Searle (left) barely got his goggles dirty in the second moto before another injury worry...

Thomas Covington goes the extra mile. A superb start on Saturday was missing on Sunday but the eighteen year old has showed signs of improvement in 2015 and that has to be the goal for what is still his second year as a Pro

64
Kawasaki
MONSTER ENERGY
PARIS EUROPE
THOR
MONSTER ENERGY

PLAY
84
59
JUMBO
WILVO
LEMMENS
MOTOREX
ATHENA
BELORAY
PIRELLI

Alex Tonkov missed the holeshots from Holland two weeks ago and Herlings showed no mercy as he came through the pack. Good to see Kevin Strijbos back in MXGP; the Belgian was eighth overall in his first appearance since round two. KRT's Tyla Rattray (above, right) was solid towards another top ten finish as he carried the Kawasaki crew by himself for the second race in a row

A stressy meeting for privateer Shaun Simpson ended on a positive note and his third top six finish in the last four motos. The British Champion remains the UK's best hope of a rousing result at Matterley Basin in just over a week...

HITACHI
DUNLOP
450
24
MXGP
DID

Jack Miller paid MXGP and his old boss Pit Beirer a visit at Talavera. Gautier Paulin meanwhile (below) had little reason to smile as the Frenchman could not get out of the gate/around the first turn to move into podium contention. A frustrating half a step back after such a powerful performance in Holland

Spanish fans watch Jorge Prado post a victory that was perhaps the most significant for the national motocross scene since Jonathan Barragan's last MX1 win back in 2009...

The story of Adam Sterry's (811 with the red plate) Grand Prix as the British youngster's normally strong starts let him down at Talavera. Desprey went 1-1 which gave the 'red' back to the Frenchman (141). No other racer apart from the two aforementioned have seen a chequered flag first in the three rounds of nine so far

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MXGP OVERALL RESULT

Riders		
1	Tony Cairoli, ITA	KTM
2	Max Nagl, GER	Husqvarna
3	Romain Febvre, FRA	Yamaha
4	Clement Desalle, BEL	Suzuki
5	Evgeny Bobryshev, RUS	Honda

MX2 OVERALL RESULT

Riders		
1	Valentin Guillod, SUI	Yamaha
2	Jeffrey Herlings, NED	KTM
3	Jordi Tixier, FRA	Kawasaki
4	Max Anstie, GBR	Kawasaki
5	Tim Gajser, SLO	Honda

MXGP STANDINGS AFTER 6 OF 18 ROUNDS

Riders		Points
1	Max Nagl	259
2	Clement Desalle	247
3	Tony Cairoli	229
4	Gautier Paulin	208
5	Romain Febvre	196

MX2 STANDINGS AFTER 6 OF 18 ROUNDS

Riders		Points
1	Jeffrey Herlings	261
2	Dylan Ferrandis	205
3	Pauls Jonass	177
4	Tim Gajser	169
5	Valentin Guillod	169

A memorable race for a pair of Frenchman. Romain Febvre (left) grasps MXGP podium glory for the first time while Jordi Tixier came within two laps of his first victory for Kawasaki

Some see life as a challenging track toward success, glory and podiums. Some just see a track.

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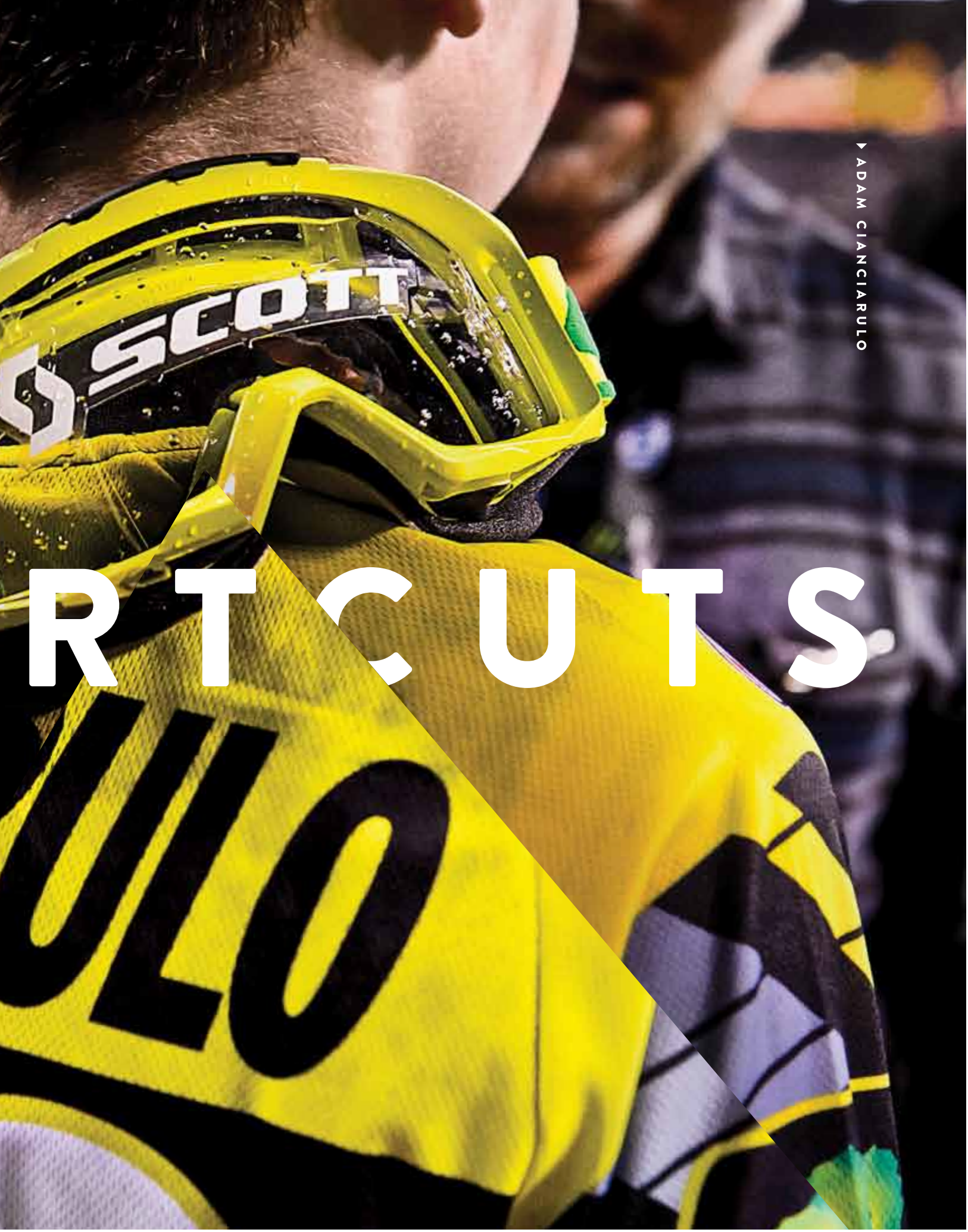

RTCUTS

SCOTT

TIME TO SHIFT THE DIRT...

By Adam Wheeler

I was surprised that some of the most significant news to hit the FIM Motocross World Championship in recent years barely came to the surface in the past three weeks. The fact that Track Manager Greg Atkins is no longer part of the Youthstream staff roster could mean that the shape, feel and flow of the racing courses could undergo interesting renovations for the rest of 2015 and until the promoters decide upon a permanent replacement figure or crew for the future.

An ever-morphing racing circuit is one of the key characters in any Grand Prix. It can dictate a range of factors: from safety to entertainment to atmosphere to value for fans to enjoyment/demands on the riders. There are FIM rules and guidelines (a maximum length of 1.75km and minimum of 1.5, minimum width of 5m – even though this can be bypassed in special cases like that of Namur – width, fence posts and trackside margins for fans) and the generally accepted notion that a range of jumps and obstacles not only increase the technical level of the course but also make for better viewing on TV and from the enclosures. Unsurprisingly Youthstream top brass allegedly sign-off plans for layouts on any new-builds.

While track design and prep is not rocket science there certainly is a science involved and I've often thought that it is the most thankless task in the Grand Prix paddock. Months of work can be thrown into chaos or wrecked by poor weather in the build-up or over the GP weekend itself. Ripping even the hardest hard-pack becomes perilous if the climate takes a turn for the worse. New tracks often need time to bed-in and it must be hard to predict how a specific terrain will start to churn, especially with each European MXGP round now entertaining at least four classes – sometimes five – and a relentless programme of activity that make working on the course infrequent and hurried. Add to this the reasonable gamut of older circuits that are on the calendar and long-established track crews that might have ideas different to your own. At some places it is simply impossible to make many alterations because of space and resources.

Aside from skills at the controls of machinery, judging a trajectory, and manipulating earth the track manager also has to be a diplomat and be able to absorb feedback, comments, criticism and compliments. Speaking with ten different riders after a race has often brought such a large spectrum of opinion on a track. Those that praised a surface and layout were countered by comments from others that slammed the need for the service crew to remove bumps and be guilty of over-maintenance.

I've heard plenty of voices from the riding fraternity questioning the increasing placement of bigger jumps and obstacles in MXGP in the last half a decade. I'm not sure if the ratio has altered in terms of quantity and the oldest racer in MXGP now is David Philippaerts (32 this December) who started his GP career in 2003 so it is not as if there is a generation of stars that remember grass circuits and flat speedbowls like Roggenburg in Switzerland.

They do seem have a point though.

Waves and airtime are increasing frequent at a Grand Prix and – as the riders themselves say – it is hard to catch or pass someone when everyone is hitting it at a set speed. While this has had the positive repercussion of raising the skill level of any young racers with aspirations of Grand Prix and a decent professional contract, it is questionable how much it has improved the action. Obstacles can slow the average mph of a track but there is also the safety issue. You could argue that riders hit a jump as fast and as hard as they want (the first separator of technique and bravery) and in this respect a huge double (like that in Si Racha) or step-down (step forward St Jean D'Angely or Matterley Basin) is cruelly tantalising but when it goes wrong then it is as bad for the image of the series as it is for the poor blighter who is on his way to hospital.

The evolution of Grand Prix tracks has not benefited from much unity. Dissenting voices among the paddock have come sporadically and messily and earlier this year it was encouraging to hear Youthstream talking of a 'Friday committee' comprised of a cross section of riders to make recommendations and suggestions on the eve of a meeting. I've yet to hear of any of the MXGP or MX2 names moving forward with this initiative although I did have a in-depth chat with one of the paddocks more passionate and articulate people on the subject, Davide Guarneri, in Nakhonchaisri, Thailand this March, perhaps the last time when a track divided opinion so strongly.

Ironically Greg Atkins' last hefty contribution to MXGP was the creation of the Patagonia venue in Argentina and the volcanic earth and unsurpassed level of support by the locals allowed the creation of a course that was universally praised. Will the polemic nature of this subject calm with inevitable changes over the coming months? With the multi-dimensional flavour of the FIM World Championship in terms of circuits and topography there will always be a struggle for true, high level consistency. Youthstream and the FIM have helped raise standards enormously and now there is the opportunity to seek out some new ideas while also addressing the throbbing issue of how the steadfast level of safety can be kept intact with so much going on at every European Grand Prix.

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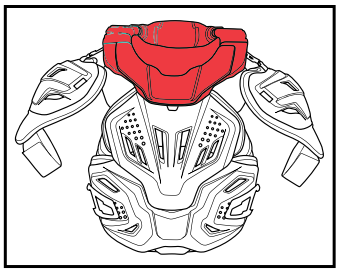

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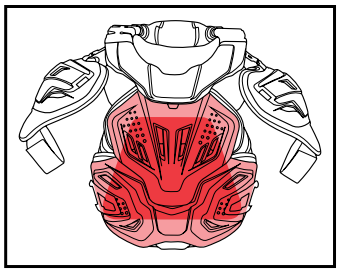

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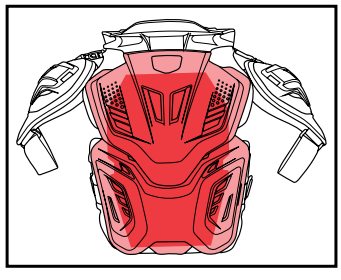

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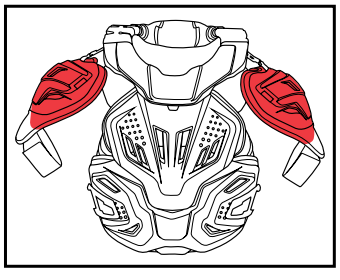

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WHITE KNIGHT

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

AT 27 YEARS OF AGE RED BULL ICEONE HUSQVARNA'S MAX NAGL IS IN THE FORM OF HIS LIFE AND HAS NEVER LOOKED SO VERSATILE OR UNBEATABLE IN HIS CAREER. WE TOOK FIFTEEN MINUTES AWAY FROM THE MXGP CHAMPIONSHIP LEADER TO TALK ABOUT THE REMARKABLE TURNAROUND FROM INJURY-RAVAGED RACER TO THE MAN MOST LIKELY TO DETHRONE TONY CAIROLI AFTER SIX YEARS...

There is a lingering feeling and air of mystery about Max Nagl. How can somebody so unassuming, friendly and so damn unlucky be so fantastically fast on a motorcycle and now be sitting as the current master of MXGP? 28 in August and a former factory KTM and Honda rider in the premier class – that he entered back in 2007 – Nagl has weathered some horribly tough moments in his career; one that boasts a smattering of victories and a runner-up position to Cairoli in 2009. From numerous broken bones, a serious back injury in 2010/11, infections, viruses and a two year episode that didn't quite work out with HRC Nagl has continued to battle through. There have been bright moments for this son of Hubert, manager of the German Nations team, such as a long-standing status as Germany's 'next one' until Ken Roczen came along, Nations success in 2013 and recently the birth of son Mason with girlfriend Sabrina in December last year.

I've interviewed Max about speed (there is no other rider quite so prolific from holeshot to chequered flag) and about injury but never about leading the standings of the premier class. When he elected to leave HRC last autumn – and the Japanese wanted to keep him but apparently were not keen on another two-year agreement – the move to the Belgium-based IceOne crew (a team that appeared well suited in terms of misfortune due to injury reoccurrence in the past three years) seemed like an easy one. Nagl would essentially be back on KTM-born technology, with former mechanic Bart with whom he had some of his best seasons with the Austrians, and is a more flexible works operation compared to the resourceful framework provided by Honda.

It would have been stupid to write Nagl off as a race winner prior to 2015. Particularly after his brilliant end to the HRC chapter in Brazil and Mexico last summer but his poor record of completing a campaign healthy and therefore making a valid push for a championship was – and perhaps still is – a contentious issue. What is beyond doubt is that Max has never looked more likely. German fans perhaps wondering 'what now?' after Roczen's departure to the USA can now relish the Nagl they have been waiting for over half a decade and the trio of Cairoli, Paulin and Desalle that have bubbled to the top of MXGP in the past three years can count on a fourth member of the elite...

Can you remember a time when you were as happy as strong and as confident as you are now?
Not really…2009 was a good year for me. I had only one small injury and everything was going well. But my private life changed a lot with Sabrina and my son and this has made quite a difference for me.

Some people have that extra responsibility and can get a bit nervous and priorities change…
For me it is only positive, especially after racing or training because when you grab your kid you just forget about the rest. You change your mindset and for me that extra way to relax has helped. I am looking at my job with different eyes.

So would you say you have changed? Maybe not in how you train or prepare or conduct yourself as a professional athlete but you are able to deal with bad days on the track…
Hmm, no. I'm still really 'set' because I have that discipline and I still really want to win. If I have a bad day or qualification race then I am still pissed off at myself…I guess the difference is that it's not for that long! [before] I'd be angry with myself with most of the evening but now I begin to think 'what can I make better?' A normal evening with the family means that you can shut things off.

Things started to pick up for you as a GP winner at the end of last year and you ended your stint with Honda on a happy note but there must have been some times when you thought 'when am I going to get a result?' The fans might have thought that also and wondered why you couldn't make it happen on a works Honda…
Yeah…until Lommel, until the last European round last year it was tough. Honda could not make big steps in terms of improvement on the bike. I was pushing them really hard. After Lommel we went to Italy for testing and there they gave me a lot of new parts to try on the engine. We could make it a lot better and then we went to Brazil and Mexico and we could make some good results…but then the season was over.

I remember you saying in Mexico that being an HRC rider was not what you expected it to be…
It's true. It was always my dream and I remember my Dad telling me as a kid that to be a Honda HRC factory rider meant it was 'done'. It is the biggest goal you can reach in your career, so I was expecting a lot and I was a bit disappointed with how it went.

But it seems like you had the resources to do whatever you wanted...
Yeah, but first of all the distance with Japan is obviously big so if there was new material then they'd want to test it first in Japan – of course – and that takes some weeks and months and then it is even longer before it gets to Europe. That was one difficult part. The guys were trying hard and were doing a good job but it was not just fast enough and maybe the [they're] philosophy is different for the racing. It was not always easy, let's say.

When you signed the contract with IceOne and Husqvarna did you know you'd be walking into something much different?
I knew the bike would be good, just from all those years on a KTM. The only thing I was a bit worried about was the suspension. When I changed from KTM to Honda I found something that was better and it was really good on the Honda and with their chassis. The only weak point was the engine. When I tested the Husqvarna for the first time my first impression was that I had a lot more power but then I was really surprised about how the suspension and frame had improved in just two years. It was really, really good and on the same level as the Honda.

Did it take much time to find the right setting?
It took some time, especially with the height of the bike because I was used to the Honda, which was smaller. In the beginning the Husqvarna was too high and hard for me so we did a lot of tests with WP and we found some good settings...but not perfect. Then we were in Sardinia for two weeks pre-season and one day we discovered something that felt really good and we still have that setting today! Since that day we have not touched a single thing on the bike and normally that's the best scenario you can have because you always know what the bike will do and how it will feel.

If you look around the paddock then it seems some riders are making very small tweaks to the bike over the weekend whereas some others are surrounded by technicians and still don't seem to have the ideal plan...
It is always a problem when you need to change the bike a lot. You can make it better... or worse, but you also don't really know what it is doing when you hit a bump. The key is to know what the bike will do when you take that bump, even if you do change a few clicks.

What about your confidence? Qatar two years ago was horrible with the stomach virus, Lausitzring was also grim with the illness and then the broken wrist last year...did you feel that you had it in you to win again quickly?
You know, another change that came about in 2014 at Lommel was in my diet. I found out I had some allergies to certain types of food; exactly the stuff I was eating between the races!

Was that gluten?
No, with milk and also small properties in things like bananas. That's why I feel so strong now and less prone to stomach infections. I can also handle different types of food better and going somewhere like Qatar and Thailand this year wasn't such a problem.

So you always knew inside you that you could win a Grand Prix again and you could match the speed of people like Desalle, Cairoli and Paulin...
After Lommel Brazil came around and I could get into a position to win but it was still really hard because I had the effects of that stomach infection; it takes a few months to go away. I remember feeling terrible after that race and almost wanting to die, physically it was very tough to deal with. Going into the winter I was unsure. I spoke a lot with my trainer, Hugo, because if you have to go to a GP, pass the chequered flag and have to fall onto the ground straight afterwards then it makes no sense to keep on racing. So then we started changing the programme and also my diet and it has been a different story this year. I'm still tired after a race but in the normal sense, and it gives me a lot of confidence to head into the next races.

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You say you have found an ideal home with IceOne Husqvarna but then they have also landed a rider that they badly needed. Does it feel nice to have created a buzz around the place?
Yeah. Many riders probably say that they have found 'the best team' when they change but I really think that this is the best team I have ever had. First of all it is a small crew with not so many people so there are less problems. Then there is only one boss, which is Antti [Pyrhonen]. OK, there is Kimi [Raikkonen, Team Owner] and Robert Jonas [Husqvarna Sport Director] in the background but on the track and at the race days it is Antti. Everybody listens to him and the group fits nicely together. Plus the support from Kimi for what we do is great. You only have to look inside the awning to see that we have one of the nicest set-ups in the whole paddock and everything is so well organised; the workshop is amazing. It is all part of why the results have been good.

It was in 2011 when you were struggling with your back injury and there was even some talk that you were finished at the highest level. It seemed like a very serious thing. It is a condition that is ancient history or something you still need to take care of...?
I still have to look after it. I find that as long as I am busy and I keep on training then I don't have any back problems but when the season is over and I have my five week break where I do nothing then it starts to ache a bit more every week. As soon as I start training again in November then it goes away. I need to keep on working on my muscles and I think it will be something I'll have to do for the rest of my life. [thinks] 2011 was a hard year. I was even thinking about stopping at that time. I was ready to quit motocross because I could not even walk and was in bed for months. I lost all my muscle definition and had to work so hard to come back. I guess it was almost normal for KTM to think 'we have to stop with Max because it is over'...but it wasn't. I was fighting it. I had

a hernia and they had to take it out and put a piece of bone between the vertebrae and screw it together so now it is one big piece of bone.

Lying on a beach for most people is relaxing... it is virtually the opposite for you...
I'm OK for a week, but then I feel it.

What about when Mason gets cubby and heavier?
I can feel that now! Sabrina can put him in one of those carriers so he is on your chest but I cannot do it. It is strange. I can do two forty minute motos around any track without pain but carrying a kid for ten minutes is impossible!

I don't want to call it a 're-birth' or 'resurrection' because you have always been near the top of MXGP but flying through the pack and passing everybody in Argentina must have been such a good feeling...
Yeah, up until now Argentina has been the best GP because in Qatar I got two starts and just 'went' and Argentina was fifth-sixth on the start and it was an amazing feeling to pass Clement, Villopoto and Cairoli. It gave me a lot of self-confidence. It made me feel different.

I can recall speaking with you after races in the past and you were so frustrated at being unable to overtake...
I still have this problem actually. It wasn't the case in Argentina; it was a good day there but in Arco in the first race I could not pass Tony, even though I was faster. It is a problem that I am always too nice to the others. Some people just clean you off the track but I don't do that. It is just who I am. I want to pass them...but just without putting their face into the dirt.

Maybe the fans will get to appreciate that again because with the rise of Roczen it seemed like Germany almost forgot you a little bit. Perhaps now Teutschenthal will be very busy once again...
Like you say Kenny's way was like an explosion whereas my mine was more flat and consistent. Now he has had some troubles and I am coming back. I can notice immediately that the fans are responding. For sure it will be a busy week up to Teutschenthal and a busy weekend but I am really looking forward to it and making the podium there would be awesome.

Lastly you – perhaps more than anybody else – know that you can be on top of the podium and the hero one minute but back in a medical room looking at an x-ray the next. So are you savouring this excellent spell?
Yes. Sometimes it is hard to describe the feeling. This year I decided to skip some other races that I would normally do just to get some rest. I had a feeling that this would be 'the' season where I would want to go for it. In 2009 I was second in the championship but I don't think I was mentally ready to go for the title. Now I am...and that's the plan.

WORKING WITH MAX: BART DIRKX

"Max was already a guy who was very honest and knew what he was doing when it came to the bike in terms of settings and everything. We worked together for three years at KTM and I gained a lot of information and experience from that."

"I write everything down, even the smallest details and sometimes not even things connected directly to the bike. In those first years we went to all the races; the German Championship, the Internationals, and we travelled a lot together. It meant that when he came to this team everything was very easy. I knew how he would want to be organised and Max is a little bit of a perfectionist! When is everything is correct then he is capable of doing amazing things."

"I think my way to work also suits him. I would rather take three hours and fix something so it is absolutely right rather than turn it around in twenty-five minutes and it's not perfect."

"It doesn't feel like he is demanding, but he wants everything at the right setting and if you come to know someone like that then you build a bike exactly how the rider wants it. The last time we went for a breaking-in ride with a brand new motorcycle he climbed on it and said "everything's good" I asked if he wanted a tweak to the lever here or there and it was all fine. And that's a great feeling for me because I measured everything with the height, the positions and the seat and had everything just right."

"He is a nice and kind guy and is always saying thank you and asks for things rather than demands them and I appreciate that."

"I think having a family has changed him. He is so happy when he is with Mason. At Benicasim in Spain for the pre-season test he was really professional in the day and working a lot, testing, then training and doing all he could but then afterwards he would be like a normal father. Seeing him relaxed like that is a big difference. Before we might go to dinner in the evening and he'll still talk about the bike or the training but now when all that is done he steps into a normal life and I think it is much better for him."

"I do get emotional when I think about that first Grand Prix in Qatar this year. It was amazing, amazing. He was working so hard and doing everything he possibly could for a result like that. I was so happy…I cannot describe it."

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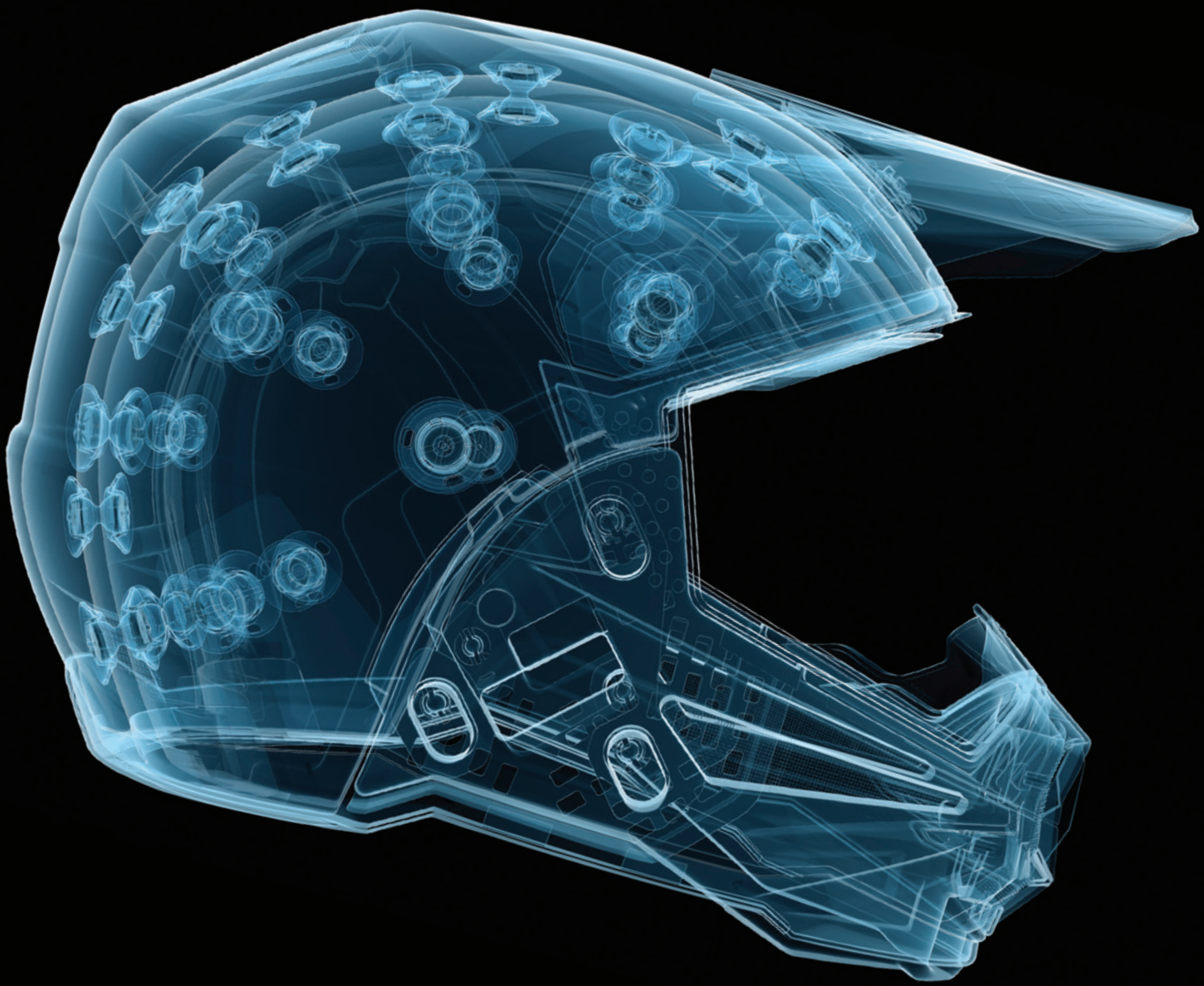

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RED MIST

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

The flamboyant Frenchman wiped the floor in the fifth round of MXGP through the Dutch sand of Valkenswaard and it was the first glimpse of the unbeatable 2014 Motocross of Nations winner that fans had seen since his high profile move to be a factory Honda rider last winter. Gautier has started life in red quietly but consistently and is 51 points adrift of Max Nagl at the time of writing.

We pinned him to a ten minute chat the evening before his maiden success in Holland (he is now only the second rider in MXGP to win with three different brands in the class, Ken de Dycker is the other) to get a gauge on how he feels about his transfer and his work as the calendar neared the end of the first third of fixtures...

GAUTIER PAULIN

On taking his time to show his potential with HRC...
I have had a lot of new people around me and now we have reached a point where it is working well. Sometimes it was tough at the beginning of the season to ride at my level and the level I wanted so I had to fight with people that I am not used to. My last race was the Motocross of Nations before starting with Honda and when you come off something like that then it is not easy. I have kept quite close in the championship and from an inside perspective I am happy with the job we have been doing. I'm pretty confident, I would say, about what the future will bring.

On making the Honda his...
We have been doing a lot of tests and especially before Valkenswaard and I'm happy. It is quite funny when the fans come up to you and say things like "the bike looks too small for you". They are just looking at the results but I know what has been happening during the week and I know the bike is perfect for me. Everybody has been doing a great job but sometimes you just need time. I've had to be patient but I am the sort of guy who always wants to improve my skills, improve the bike every day and get the suspension and engine better. There has been a stage where I could not go at my level but now we are ready.

On feeling one with the bike and showing some Paulin magic...
I love to ride a bike. Talent is one thing but skill is another. I worked hard when I was in BMX and I have continued that and have pushed very hard now I'm with Honda. The colour of the bike has changed but also everything underneath and I've had to adjust. Mentally I am also a guy who likes to understand what I am doing and why and not just open the gas and hold on. Many people say, "now you need to disconnect your brain and go for the lap-time" but that is not me at all. I have been building results since the start of the season and my skills also.

On accumulating experience and not worrying about doubt in the media...
To be honest I don't read much of the press in motocross. I won my first race in MX1 [MXGP] as a wild-card in 2011 and then my second race in the second GP of 2012. So I have heard it all really. I think this is a great championship with a lot of good riders. It is very easy to write or say something on the internet and it one way it is great that people live for that and if people care about your results then that is also positive. I don't think many others are at the level I am right now and I appreciate that people might enjoy their racing through what results or performance I can give. There will always be kids coming up and although my name has been around for a while I am not thirty years old! I'm not the young guy but I have just turned twenty-five and came into MXGP early. Overall, I'm really enjoying being part of this championship.

On some wondering why he didn't hit the ground winning with HRC...
There are some people who want you to do well and others who do not but it is a pyramid and there is only one spot at the top. If it was all so easy then I don't think any achievement in this sport would be so cool. You need to have some adrenaline and hard work so that when it pays off it feels even better. Not many people understand and there are riders that fill every position: from the leader to twentieth place. If they knew everything that it took to be here then I guess they would be behind the gate with us.

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HIS 2015 SUPERCROSS SEASON BLOWN TO SMITHEREENS FROM UNTIMELY CRASHES AND OFF-SONG RESULTS, JUSTIN BARCIA SHOWED UP AT THE SEASON FINALE IN LAS VEGAS KEEN ON TURNING THINGS AROUND AND STARTING THE SUMMER OFF WITH SOME BADLY NEEDED FORWARD MOMENTUM.

By Eric Johnson
Photos by Monster Energy/Simon Cudby

Sam Boyd Stadium in heat stricken Las Vegas, Nevada served as the last gasp of the 2015 Monster Energy Supercross Series. And with that an end of term vibe had settled in upon the large grassy pit areas surrounding the college football venue as summer was fast approaching, and with it, the second act of the '15 racing season - the 12-round Lucas Oil Pro Motocross Championship. Present in the big neon glitter of sand, glass and concrete this first Saturday in May was Justin Barcia. Battered and bruised, both physically and psychologically, the last five months have been brutal for the normally sensational AutoTrader.com/Toyota/Yamaha/JGRMX racer.

After a somewhat slow start to the season - Barcia never broke the top five during the opening phase of the stadium tour - things went from bad to worse when "Bam Bam" was badly hurt during a mid-season, mid-week test session. Having healed up during the ensuing weeks, he finally returned to the fray at round 13 at NRG Stadium in Houston, Texas to try and get some tune-up time before one curtain came down – supercross – and another curtain was drawn up – the nationals. Coming off a three-race run that included Houston, Santa Clara and a star-crossed run at East Rutherford, Barcia was now in Vegas and trying to keep his head up.

"I'm excited for this to be over. It was a tough year," Barcia sighed while sitting upon a work bench stationed in the JGR team transporter. "There were a lot of things going on and nothing worked out the way I wanted it to both on the track and off the track. It was super-challenging for me. Right now I've just been working had on outdoors and trying to get in the right places so I can do that. I just want to charge into outdoors."

Straining to remain as positive as possible while in Las Vegas, Barcia conceded that he really wasn't yet up to speed from the practice crash which cracked his pelvic bone. "I feel aright, like I feel good on the bike and stuff like that, but the speed I have is not quite race speed yet. I'm probably at 60-percent or 70-percent I guess you could say. Physically, I feel good. I'm just a little slow on the bike."

"I'm healed-up for the most part," he furthered, "but I had some big crashes in Jersey last week so that kind of set me back a little, but yeah, training-wise I've been riding my bicycle a lot and doing a lot of outdoor motos. I'm just kind of focused on that and finishing off here in Vegas and stay safe and healthy and look to the outdoors."

The beauty of racing the American circuit is that if the supercross season doesn't follow the planned script, a second chance is afforded in the shape of the Lucas Oil Pro Motocross Championship. Staged on the sweeping, high-speed natural terrain circuits of this nation, it's all classic motocross in every sense of the word and it's a word Barcia likes the ring of.

"I feel good about outdoors," exclaimed Barcia, spirits visibly lifted. "I got to California next week to do some testing and ride some different racks. I'm excited. I think it will be good. I really want it to be good and I feel it can be good. Our bike is extremely fast and we've got the suspension dialed. Yeah, it'll be a good year."

JUSTIN BARCIA

Through working through his injury and the subsequent rehabilitation that came with it, Barcia kept himself in reasonably good fighting shape. Furthermore, while the closing segment of the supercross series hasn't lit the world on fire, it has allowed Justin to race himself back into form and to be prepared for the drop of the gate at the Hangtown Motocross Classic.

"I really do think I'm ready. I'm definitely going to Hangtown to be in the fight, for sure. I want to be in the championship hunt. I feel like it's definitely possible and I feel like I should be battling for wins and podiums all year and staying consistent. My supercross season, in the beginning, I was super-consistent and was near the top five and stuff like that, but that's not what we were looking for. It wasn't going to plan, but I was more consistent then I have I've ever been. Then I had the injury. I feel like outdoors will be good."

A rough and tumble year thus far and one he is very eager to recover from, Barcia admitted that is has been tough, and will be tough, to try and remain patient on the racetrack.

"Oh, for sure it's hard to stay patient! And then when I come back to the races I'm not ready, it's definitely super-tough. Yeah, it was a tough year. There was a lot of things going on and nothing worked out the way I want it to, both on the track and off the track. It was super-challenging for me. Right now I'm just been working hard on outdoors and getting everything in the right places so I can do good.

"There are over five guys that are going to be fighting for the championship this year. It will be a tough one, for sure. I definitely won't be happy if we're not on the podium a lot and we should definitely be winning some of those races, for sure."

AMA BLOG

A BRIEF RESPITE...

By Steve Matthes

Well the 2015 Monster Energy Supercross series is a wrap with the KTM kids of Dungey and Musquin winning their respective mains yet again. The indoor competition wasn't the greatest this year but it did give some media and fans a new respect level for Red Bull KTM rider Dungey.

The fact he won supercross isn't that surprising - he was one of the favourites - but the way he did it was true greatness. 16 podiums from 17 races, 8 wins and walking to the second biggest points gap in SX history (only Jeremy McGrath in 1996 won by more) showed that perhaps he reached a new level in 2015. Of course we'll never know if he would have been able to beat four-time supercross champion Ryan Villopoto but it says here that Ryan Dungey's better than ever before.

With the outdoor series approaching this weekend, let's take a look at a few different news and notes from the series:

-The **Lucas Oil Pro Motocross Championships** kicks off this weekend at Hangtown, California with a few changes from past years. The twelve race, twenty-four moto format will change back to its original outline of having the 450MX class go second and fourth on the day. A few years ago MX Sports, the folks who run the nationals now, made the decision to put the 250MX class second for a number of reasons but they'll go back to the traditional way. A few of the reasons why that was done was to get the fans to stick around for the premier class, help the 450 USA stars get better used to a rougher track (one of the things the USA MXDN riders had been telling people was they were a bit unprepared for the rough nature of the GP tracks).

Also **Bud Light** has come on-board as a series sponsor for the qualifying winners and the series continues building it's TV presence with most motos on live TV across three networks, a pre-race online show and much more.

-Rumors over here had **Ryan Villopoto** packing up stakes at his GP effort and racing the USA nationals for his Monster Kawasaki team but that's not going to happen. The thinking was with Kawasaki firing Davi Millsaps, there's an open spot on the team, the GP plan isn't working out the way many people thought it would and maybe we would see Villopoto back here. As we said, it's not going to happen but make no mistake about it, there were some talks that apparently Monster Energy, the teams main sponsor, shut down. RV's tailbone injury is going to keep him away for another three weeks or so (which would eliminate him from any shot at the USA title) and he'll be back at the Grand Prix's when ready but there was some talks about seeing if he would be interested in coming back home to help Kawasaki out.

-RCH Suzuki's **Kenny Roczen**'s coming into Hangtown with the number one plate but the race will also mark his first gate drop in over two months. Roczen's ankle is either, depending on who you talk to, still really bothering him or not an issue and he's flying at the test tracks. Roczen and Dungey had a great battle last year for the crown and until Roczen answered with a clutch of great rides in the mud at Indiana, Dungey was really coming on. This year, Roczen's trainer from last year Aldon Baker, is now with Dungey and Roczen is on his own so it should be interesting to see what happens between these two as the series goes on. Give the edge to Dungey for the title by the slimmest of margins.

There's no doubt that these two are probably 1A and 1B favorites for the title with GEICO Honda's **Eli Tomac** right there if he can get his starts figured out. Tomac's exasperated about talking about his starts, watching video of his starts and thinking about them. He told me that his reactions are usually not the issue, it's the opening corners and laps that set him back. With more room to move around outdoors, Tomac's thinking he should be better set early in the race than he was in supercross. Let's hope so for his sake.

It should be noted that Honda's Trey Canard, he of those great rides at the end of the 450MX season last year, won't be on the gate until probably four or five races in. Andrew Short of the BTOSports KTM team will also miss most of the series with an injury.

-After that it's the trio of Yoshimura Suzuki's Blake Baggett (don't sleep on him folks), JGR Yamaha's **Justin Barcia** and Weston Peick and maybe Honda's Cole Seely who will battle for podiums and top five's. It's a big series for Barcia on the Yamaha. He's struggled with so-so finishes and injuries in the last three series he's done (2014 SX and MX on the Honda and '15 SX on the Honda) so he needs a big effort this summer. As well, we'll see if Jason Anderson of the Rockstar Husqvarna team can keep on progressing and getting in better shape than he was last year.

-Of course the wild card in this whole thing could be Anderson's new team-mate in **Christophe Pourcel**. The Frenchman is stepping up into the 450MX class this year so the former World Champion is going to see how he stacks up with the big boys. Pourcel's raced the 450GP's (and won there) so he's no stranger to the bigger bike but he has raced most years in the small bike class.

Last year riding on the Valli Yamaha team with a factory bike, Pourcel captured 10 out of the 12 pole positions and won one race. There were lots of laps led but his fitness seemed to be an issue more than a few times. With this late start to his 450MX season, he might not come out of the gate blazing but should have some good rides here and there. No matter how he does, it will be interesting.

-The 250MX series kicks off with all of the main players from last year still in the class save for Baggett and Pourcel. Team-mates **Jeremy Martin and Cooper Webb** will be going at it with Webb looking to get Martin's number one plate for keeps. KTM's Marvin Musquin is healthy and ready to go in his last year in the class and **Adam Cianciarulo** is back after missing all of last year's outdoors and this year's SX with two separate shoulder injuries.

We know Martin, Webb and Musquin will get the wins and podiums but the real question mark is Cianciarulo. He's been on the sidelines a lot with injuries but the 250SX title was his to lose last year and his inaugural outdoor series in 2013 had some highs despite him being sick coming in. He'll be rusty to start but should be a factor for wins later on in the series. If, and it's a big IF, he can stay healthy.

-There's no love lost between Webb and Martin under that truck which should make a championship battle more interesting. Martin's picked up Johnny O'Mara as his trainer/riding coach and according to O'Mara, Martin's putting more motos down than he's ever seen before. And this is a guy who's worked with Ricky Carmichael back in the day. Webb, coming off a dominant 250SX season, is full of confidence and has that right amount of chip on his shoulder that a winner needs.

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BT

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

A CATCH-UP WITH A TRULY INTERNATIONAL STAR OF MOTOCROSS & SUPERCROSS. BEN TOWNLEY TALKS ABOUT NEXT CHAPTERS...

Josiah Natzke's moto win in the EMX125 European Championship last weekend gave New Zealand long overdue hope that another athlete might soon be able to make a significant impression on the international scene and be the first Kiwi to fly far in the sport since Ben Townley. No co-incidence then that the former MX2 World Champion, AMA Lites Supercross Champ, Motocross of Nations race winner and one of the most articulate and intelligent voices of his generation has been giving the teenager some words of advice.

Ben was back in the Grand Prix paddock for the first time in four years after taking up residence as a shy teenager in 2001 and departing the European stage for the AMA in 2006, before an ill-fated and brief return in 2011 that eventually gave way to a protracted retirement; the toll of many injuries proving too much for the married father of three. It is easy to dismiss Ben and his remarkable talent of being blazingly fast with a tidy style (that never really looked like he was trying as hard as he was) as a rider who missed out on more than he achieved but he set new milestones for his country in motocross. He also holds certain distinctions that nobody else can touch. He was the first ever MX2 World Champion (thus 250 four-stroke winner) in 2004 and the first rider to claim Grand Prix victories in both MX2 and MX1/MXGP classes.

So a catch-up with the new HRC consultant was overdue and also some reflection on a career where Ben was the first to open KTM's four-stroke era in Grand Prix, something that the Austrians grew to dominate in MX2 as we know it today...

BEN TOWNLEY
USGP
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TOWNLEY
Townley
101
72

SANGYONG
MICHELIN
Airoh
HELMET
MOTOREX
MOTOREX

HONDA

We've heard your name linked with the likes of Josiah and Adam Cianciarulo but you've also taken a role with HRC in Japan. What's that about?
I have been home now for three years and I'd been talking to Honda about doing something and they came up with the idea of linking with HRC in Japan. I've had a long-standing relationship with Honda in New Zealand and the Japanese link started this year. It is a neat role. I work with the HRC race team with the riders one-on-one – one of them actually came out to New Zealand for a month – I also help them with their race-bikes, which are the same CRFs that they use in MXGP. It is interesting and a new role for me.

What is the set-up and can you sometimes get 'lost in translation'?
There are three riders in Japan and a lot of stuff geared around their bikes. It interesting working on the technical side because it is not just the riding that can make a difference, it is the combination with the motorcycle. From a language perspective it can be tricky to get your ideas across but I've done a lot of demonstration riding with them and they understand. Japanese people are very diligent. In my experience so far the people I have met and worked with really want to improve and that was quite a surprise for me. When the MX1 rider came out to New Zealand he was so thorough in his work and took notes the whole time. He seems to be doing pretty well.

What does that mean though in terms of your working schedule? Japan is hardly a minor trip...
It is a monthly trip basis at the moment and it seems to be working pretty good so far. With the riders you can give them feedback and points to work on and it gives them time to develop that on their own. I'm a pretty intense type of coach. I expect - or demand - for people to improve so it is good that they can step away and have their own time to do that. It is a one year deal at the moment and I think HRC are keen to see how it will work. I've had a number of different requests to do things to be honest but probably the biggest thing for me is where I am based; my kids are very young. I'm in a position where I don't have to be flat out every day and can enjoy them while looking where I can place myself for the future. In terms of doing things with riders internationally it is just going to be hard from a geographical standpoint. I haven't launched it yet but I am keen to do some off-season boot camps in New Zealand. Jake Nicholls [Wilvo Forkrent KTM MXGP rider] was almost like the test dummy for that when he visited recently. The idea would be to stay for a set duration of time and do thirty days of off-and-on bike training. I think there is potential there but I haven't pulled the trigger on it yet.

You'd need a different angle though...like come and ride somewhere unique...
Not the way I see it. I think it will suit those guys looking to progress from something like EMX to MX2 or even from MX2 to MXGP. There is a lot I can do with them in an intensified zone. They are away from home and there are here solely to improve. It is not like they need their factory bikes with them. They can come away and work on specifics that they need to get better and make the difference in the off-season; that period is where you build your foundation. There are always improvements that you can do as a rider on your technique.

So is that where you want to head with the next phase of your life or have you not figured it out yet...?
I've not totally figured it out. There is an itch to do something with motorbikes still, absolutely, and especially after coming back to Grand Prix and in Europe these last couple of weeks. It is a shame we are so far away from the motocross world because I have really enjoyed myself. The last time I was here I was in a bit of a haze. I had that major injury with the concussion. My whole experience of that time was not good and I was not mentally right even though I enjoyed my time in Europe. The last stint here was not a true reflection of me. I've enjoyed being here now and from a different perspective because I'm here with a young kid out of a small easy-up.

Curious that you say you are a demanding coach because you have taken influences and lessons from a number of people like Joel Smets, Stefan Everts, Harry Nolte, Mitch Payton. Have you been able to pick bits from those guys?
Absolutely and I think that is one of my strengths. When I was young Josh [Coppins] took me under his wing and I learnt stuff from him. I trained a lot with Joel and got to know Stefan. I was very quick to understand that you are not going to be one of them and you have to build yourself up from taking the best advice that applies to you.

Did you also make your own judgements about those people...?
Exactly. I was quick to decipher what I thought was good and I'd lock that away and discard the rest. I think that is why I learnt so quickly.

Have you chatted to HRC peer Jean-Michel Bayle about coaching as he seems to have an alternative take on things...
Yeah but Jean-Michel Bayle is working with the elite. They are expected to be good. With Josiah I am with a kid who has big goals and aspirations and if you have those then the effort needs to match the desire to achieve. If it doesn't then we are all wasting our time. I do this out of pure passion for these kids in New Zealand. There is absolutely zero financial incentive for me whatsoever. I do it because I want to see a successful Kiwi. I was the last person from our country to race professionally and I turned Pro in 2001! I have huge motivation to see him – and others – succeed if they are willing to. JMB is working with athletes at a level where we want the next set of kids to be, and there are a lot of people behind these kids making sacrifices. That's why I demand a lot.

The last time I saw you do a major international race was the first Monster Energy Cup in Vegas. Can you talk a bit about the flip side of going from being a race winner and a rider used to adulation and status to one that goes into semi-retirement and heading back home to be with the family...?
That's what is probably hard for a European to understand because that's where we come from and that's what we know. I always said in a lot of interviews that when I first came to do a GP or went to Anaheim that I had never been able to reach out and touch a superstar. I'd just see it on TV. So to go back to that lifestyle is just about 'going home'. Home for a lot of these European or U.S. kids is a scene routed very much around the sport. It is just a different culture where we are from and Josiah is an example of that because he'd in awe of everything here whereas every other kid in his class is used to it, seen it and touched it. It is a big step. To answer your question there was not big adjustment. It is just normal life and you enjoy it.

So you didn't need to adjust in any way?
A little bit. The only part I had to adjust to was actually the sport specific stuff. I had a hard time and I guess that is why I am really enjoying my HRC role because I get on a plane and I arrive and it is back to the highest level – and it is the highest level of motocross in terms of the way they do it. Then on the way back to New Zealand I'll be thinking of home and wondering 'did I leave any spokes loose on that bike?' Being home is very far removed from anything like you find here [in the paddock, in Europe]. Back home Josh has got the best race truck in the series and it is half the size of most of these things [gestures to the HRC hospitality Semi]. In New Zealand I think they do a good job with the sport but it is still not really what I know...

Were you able to make good investments in your last couple of years racing and don't have to worry too much about the bank balance now?
I was smart. It is not like I have been investing here there and everywhere but I did not waste money. I would not say I am well-off but I am in a comfortable position.

Working is a question of identity as well because your kids will grow up seeing trophies, memories, photos, clippings and will know you were a successful athlete. So then it is about setting an example...
It is a difficult thing to answer fully because – personally – I did not achieve what I set out to-

Wait...How can you not be satisfied with your career?
Because it doesn't look how I expected it to. When I came here I was like anyone; I was just along for the ride and all I wanted to be was a professional. And then twelve months after I started I got on a GP podium and was like 'Holy shit, hang on, I might be able to do well at this thing' and then I was world champion and I wanted to be again and then I got the shot to chase my dream and it was 'wow!' It started off really well but it never continued how I built it up in my mind.

From the way I see it – as someone who has watched you race from beginning to end – you cannot have any regrets...
Oh, I don't have regrets. I guess I am just disappointed about the spiral it went into. I think I just learnt and progressed so much and it was all going so well...but it didn't carry on and it frustrated me and drove me to the point of stopping racing. I was getting to the point where I could not even have the satisfaction of being at the races...nevermind winning. That's what you do it for - all the rehab, training and work – just to be at the races and I couldn't even do that.

I imagine the sport must have driven you crazy at times with moments of sheer elation but there must have been painful moments of 'why do I bother?'
It does, it does. I have never done drugs but I think winning must be one of the ultimate highs. You can be up there for hours and even a couple of days. It is a pretty good 'drug'. It gave me huge elation, for sure.

What about getting up in the morning now and the aches and pains and instructing kids and even your own? Will a quick look at the scars make you think twice about letting them want to ride and race?
Nah, not at all. They will do what they want to do and I will give them every opportunity, like my parents did. They gave me the chance and I ran with it. I will give them the same guidance.

So can you see yourself as 'racer dad'?
Erm, yeah. My boy has started riding and I'm not going to lie...I love it. Not that I want them to be a racer...it is more about sharing something with them. I was just at the New Zealand junior champs recently...and I hope that he rides it one day when I saw the other fathers with their sons. My son is still young and I'd love it if he wanted to race...it is not the same as me wanting him to race though. Yeah, there is heartache with it but you just touched on the elation side of it as well which is incredible.

Speaking of Dads...the last time I saw yours was at the Thai Grand Prix last year where he was over trying to put the pieces in place for a New Zealand round of the World Championship. What's the latest on that?
Well, the contact was actually with me and we went to the Taupo Motorcycle Club and looked at the possibility of doing it together. It's not going ahead, the government shut it down. We got pretty close to be honest, really close, so there might be a chance in the future but it's really political. I'd love to see it happen but at the end of the day it comes down to the backing.

Ryan Villopoto said that you'd mentioned to him that it is harder to go one way from a series to another than it is vice-versa; so from the States to here is the tougher test. From watching him what's your take on the whole transition phase?
It is the culture shock. Actually riding the motorcycle is not the unfamiliar part. When you have 52 States then within those it is fairly similar and you can go about your life without much disruption. When you come here then you can travel a few hundred kilometres and find four different countries and cultures! To experience that and get your head around how it works is a major adjustment. Then the racing. It is different for sure and the American style and scene is different in the way they approach it. When you come here then you have to forget about what you were doing there. You have to leave it behind and it has to be a clean slate. You need to have trust in the people you have around you here. I believe Ryan didn't do that correctly. He spent way too much time in America in the off-season and he should have been here adjusting. Speed-wise there is not a big issue and in Italy it looked to me like he was well within his grasp – I know that doesn't

BEN TOWNLEY

make much sense considering he looped out – but he was in control and has been in every event. I felt he would wipe the floor in Argentina. Overall I feel that the adjustment period has come way too late. He should have been here months ago but that's hindsight...

Lastly, you were the first MX2 World Champion. Have you ridden a 250F recently?
I rode an HRC one a few months ago...

What about the difference between that '04 KTM and the 250s now twelve years on?
Oh, my KTM was fast! Very fast! It is still fast. It had a different engine to a modern day bike with the way the cam gears ran. It didn't have a chain and ran with sprockets and that thing could move. It sounds like a timebomb - and it was a lot of the time - but it was so quick that I felt like I was cheating sometimes. For sure the bikes have evolved but the raw power of that bike was impressive for its time.

STEADFAST

GETTING A LITTLE PERSONAL WITH JORGE LORENZO...

By Eric Johnson
Photos by Monster Energy

JORGE LORENZO
MONSTER
ENERGY

The Kingdom of Spain has an official motto that declares 'Plus Ultra'. Translating to "Future Beyond," Spain is the Plus Ultra of MotoGP. Spain is also the home nation of one Jorge Lorenzo. The 2010 and 2012 MotoGP World Champion, the native of Palma has been outshone by compatriot Mark Marquez the past two years, but the second half of the 2014 season saw the 27 year-old return to form, lighting up the scoring monitors with four straight runner-up finishes at Indianapolis. Brno, Silverstone and Misano. Wins also came his way at both Aragon and Motegi. It is now 2015 and Lorenzo and his potent works Yamaha YZR-M1 are out looking for that elusive third world title. Results and success have been slow in coming - and it's also become quite apparent that team-mate Valentino Rossi is going through a major renaissance - but Jorge Lorenzo is not a two-time World Champion for no reason and Jerez was duly bent to his will.

Recently, while relaxing over dinner with a few friends and colleagues, the poised and pragmatic Spaniard spoke to OTOR about a host of topics centering upon himself and his approach to competition.

Jorge, what do you say to yourself during a race? Does you talk to yourself?
Push, push, push! Hahaha! Really, I don't talk to myself. I just try to be focussed, strong and fast.

Can you talk about how important it is to set-up the bike at a GP and how important the team effort is in having a good race weekend?
Somebody can think that motorcycle racing is an individual sport. I don't feel my sport is like this. During the weekend, without my engineers, mechanics, my personal team, I wouldn't be fighting for victories. Maybe, I wouldn't be in MotoGP. For example, without my father, who made me a motorbike when I was three years old, I wouldn't be a rider. To be on top you need a good team, you have to trust in your team.

What is the Yamaha like to ride when you are pushing 100% on a fast lap?
It is crazy. The Yamaha M1 is one of the fastest bikes in the world. When you ride a monster like this you can feel the meaning of speed. Obviously, if you like the speed, you can enjoy it like you have never imagined. I didnt forget my first time with this bike...

What it's like to scrape your elbow?
You can feel the asphalt! Hahaha! It means that you are fast and you are really close to the track. Really, my riding style changes every year a little bit. Just details, but if I want to be better every year, I have to improve my style, create new things to make the difference with other riders. Everyone has his tricks.

How have you adapted to Marc Marquez moving his riding and racing to a higher level?
When you are on top in your sport you have to accept that some times you win and sometimes you lose. Marc is so strong and has a lot of skills. One of them is he learns so quickly, on braking he is extremely strong and has a special riding style that permits him to play with the bike. The Honda allows him this kind of style, maybe because of the chassis, it looks more flexible. He can show a sort of supermotard style and obviously is a tough rival to fight with face to face. He always wants to dominate everywhere, at every session and that is so stimulating for us, it's something that feeds us to try to beat him.

Where during the MotoGP series do you get the fastest, most extreme lean angle with the bike and what that feels like?
There are a lot of corners where we turn the bike until 62 degrees. Sounds crazy but for us it is normal. I like the last corners in Montmeló, for example.

How hard is it to adjust that angle in a rain race?
Is not easy to ride under the rain, but last year I won in Aragon and it was one of my best moments of the season. Under the rain you have to ride perfectly. The most smallest mistake can be a disaster. If your angle is too much or if you brake too late, you crash. If your angle is not enough, you go slower than the others. Is really more difficult in the rain, but at the same time the feeling is always special.

Is it scary riding in MotoGP?
It is not scary but after a lot of crashes you are more conscious that your sport is dangerous. If you find the way to be fast and don't take too many risks, you are on the good way. No rider is scared in MotoGP.

What do you think of the other top MotoGP racers? You, Marc, Dani and Valentino all seem to be in another league. How come?
Every rider has special skills. From Valentino, honestly, I would steal from him his abilities in a race for improvisation or his intelligence to manage the race when he is on the bike. Regarding Dani, I think he is so technical and he is able to get some advantage on acceleration because of his weight and exiting the corners. And concerning Márquez I will take his mentality. He never gives up and he always tries to win, even in the tougher conditions. Sometimes he takes too many risks but he always tries it.

Would you like to race a 500cc two-stroke?
Yes, of course! Is not easy to ride a 500! Current bikes are better in all the aspects, but the 500cc bikes have something special. I see some old races and it is really amazing how Rainey, Shcwantz, Doohan or Crivillé ride these bikes.

You post a lot of photos on social media of yourself training. How come?
I love Social Media. Is my way to be close to the fans. I try to show who I am outside the circuits...

How fit do you have to be to ride at your level?
I'm very strictly with my diet. And I have just 15 days on vacation during the year. I try to be very flexible, so I do a lot of stretching. But at the same time I have to be fit and strong. I love hard work and training and I love racing. Sometimes you need some quiet moments to recover and unplug but the problem maybe last year was this relaxing time was too long. I had several surgeries to take out some pieces of metal from the past that were creating some problems for me in some parts of my body. I started my pre-season too late... The most important thing is that I learned a lesson.

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What did the Aragon win last year mean to you?
It was one of the best moments of the season. It was unexpected because we were so far off during all the sessions but then the race became chaotic because of the rain and finally we won. It was a mental relief for me. I'd never been in a hurry looking for the victory and I wasn't obsessed because I knew that the win would arrive at any time when we were prepared. Yes, I have to say afterwards I felt liberated.

Can you describe your relationship with Max Biaggi? Do you know each other well? What do you guys talk about?
I met Max long time ago when I was really young. Max was my idol when I started riding and now we are friends. We talk about races but also about a lot of things and it isn't all about races.

If you could go back in time to any era of road racing, what era would it be?
I don't know... I tried to look all the riders but my favourite for his style and skills was Max Biaggi.

Can you describe your early years in MotoGP. How hard was it? How hard was it to find "the limit"?
The beginning was not easy. I crashed a lot in my first season in MotoGP. I tried to go fast but I made a lot of mistakes during the races. Despite achieving my first Pole Position in MotoGP in my first race, it was a hard season. The next year, 2009, I improved a lot and I started enjoying MotoGP more. I try to find the limit every year. Every time you have more knowledge, more experience and you really know what you need to do or not. But even if it's really difficult to keep all your skills you have to be focused to maintain your motivation, your abilities and take out the weak points. Anyway it's always hard to achieve it. I don't really know where my limit is but I guess I still have a bit to get it.

Your top three race memories?
Rio 2003, my first 125cc victory. Phillip Island in 2007 on a 250 and Silverstone in MotoGP in 2013.

What do you do for fun?
I try to visit my friends and my family. And take some flight away to relax in a 'lost place'... Just for a few days...

Who is in your personal hall of fame? In other words, friends, idols, people you admire?
Michael Jackson, Michael Jordan and Muhammad Ali... The biggest in his aspects.

What does it feel like to ride a normal production bike on the street? Is it like a toy? Do you ever just ride for leisure in Spain?
I have some bikes at home but outside the circuits I prefer to drive. I just go fast in the circuits.

What will it take to be a world champion again?
Nobody knows the future. I only can promise effort, and I will try to do my best one more time. 2015 will be better than 2014. The current level is so high; especially the first four riders in the championship regarding speed, constant pace and focus. To go one more step ahead is really difficult but it's crystal clear that if you are in a perfect shape either physically or mentally and the bike works well everything is easier. In my case it is so; if I'm fine and pretty focused I can fight for the victories.

If you could change one thing about MotoGP?
I think that they can improve the security, for example I don't agree with flag to flag rule. Is too dangerous for the riders.

What's in the near and long term future?
I have two more years in Yamaha. As I say always, I want to finish my career with Yamaha. That would be really great! And I want to try to win another World Championship, of course. But I don't know exactly when I will stop. I think about the next two years for right now.

ALL IN THE PREP...

By David Emmett

After his imperious victory at Jerez, is it fair to say that Jorge Lorenzo is back? It would be a lot more accurate to say that he has never been away. Though Lorenzo's performance at Jerez was particularly magisterial, the fact that this was his first win of the season belies just how strong he has been all year. It's just that it hasn't looked that way, because what Harold Mcmillan referred to as "events" got in the way. Lorenzo was running strongly with the leaders at Qatar when a freak problem with his helmet liner caused it to drop in front of his eyes, reducing his vision. Bad enough under any circumstances, but downright terrifying when trying to race a MotoGP bike at full speed under the floodlights. He came down with bronchitis at Austin, and struggled home to fourth, after nearly pulling out altogether the day before. (On a side note, respiratory tract infections are surprisingly common among MotoGP riders, as they spend their time training flat out, then passing through crowded airports and into those modern disease incubation and dispersal systems called commercial aircraft). At Argentina, Lorenzo made the mistake of trying to get the softer of the two rear tyre options to work, a mission which was always going to be difficult. It saw him finish fifth.

At Jerez, everything finally went right. He arrived at the track in good shape and good spirits. Crew chief Ramon Forcada immediately found a good set up. Forcada and Lorenzo went straight for the medium tyre, the softer of the two options, and always his preferred option when possible. The pieces of the jigsaw all fell into place, and Lorenzo was unbeatable all weekend. Fastest in every session except FP4 and the warm up, Lorenzo made a break at the start, dropped Marc Márquez within five laps, and was gone. He broke the race time record by 20 seconds, setting a single lap record and pole record along the way. This is what unstoppable looks like.

It was a shining example of what it takes to succeed in MotoGP. The level of competition has never been higher in the series, says Valentino Rossi. It has reached such a high level in recent years that he has been forced to break the habit of a lifetime, and actually put in some serious and committed physical training. During his early Grand Prix career, The Doctor was more likely to be found in one of Tavullia's bars, rather than the gym. Right now, every detail counts. Riders must be physically fit, and able to go flat out for 45 minutes without tiring physically or their attention flagging. The set up of the bike has to be very close from the first practice, to allow the team to hone it as near as possible to perfection by the time the race comes around. That means deciding on the right race tyre before you have even turned a wheel; spending 45 minutes of practice figuring out that your tyre of choice won't work for the race puts you hopelessly out of touch. Everything must go to plan during the race, a single mishap and victory is lost. With the current strength of the field, even a shot at the podium is lost.

For the truth is that so far this year, every race has been won by the rider who was best prepared. Valentino Rossi judged his race strategy to perfection at Qatar, making up for a bad start within a couple of laps and coming strong at the end. Marc Márquez was indomitable at Austin, as he had been the two previous years. Rossi chose the right tyre in Argentina, and worked hard to perfect his set up throughout practice. Lorenzo did the same at Jerez, and was untouchable.

To some extent, this is why Ducati have not managed to win a race so far this year. Despite the massive leap forward the GP15 has proved to be – so massive that Honda, Yamaha and Suzuki are pushing to have Ducati's concessions taken away for 2016 onwards, despite formally needing a win

this year for that to happen – it is still not entirely perfect. The bike lacks the smallest fraction of braking stability, making corner entry not quite perfect. Though it turns on a proverbial dime, it is still not perfect through the middle of the corner. It has great corner exit speed, but hasn't quite got the mechanical grip of the Yamaha, which allows the M1 to jump out of the corner. All these things mean that the Ducati has had to settle for second place in three out of the four races so far. Ducati are due to test at Mugello this week, ahead of the Le Mans round. You have to suspect they have something up their sleeve for Mugello, but also that they could be testing the missing piece of the jigsaw there.

When (and I firmly believe it is when, and not if) a Ducati takes a win, it will mean yet another Italian victory this season. This has perhaps been simultaneously the most significant and the most under reported story of the year. Not so much the Italian resurgence, as the slump in Spanish success. Of the twelve races run in the three Grand Prix classes this year, Spaniards have won only two. British riders have won twice as many, thanks largely to the astonishing form of Danny Kent in Moto3. Spaniards have just nine podiums so far this year, of a possible total of thirty six. That is the same number as Italy, and only two more than Great Britain. In 2013, Spanish riders won eleven of the twelve races, and last year, it was common for the Spanish media to be contemplating a "triplete" – either a Spanish win in all three classes, or an all-Spanish podium – at every round, and in almost every class. Now, just getting more than one rider on the podium is a big ask.

So what has happened? In part, the Spanish have been victims of events, but it also marks a serious shift of power in the paddock. Dani Pedrosa's extended absence means one competitive Spanish rider is missing every weekend. Tito Rabat's slump in form has left a big hole in the country's record in Moto2. And problems for Jorge Lorenzo and Marc Márquez have left them off the podium more often than normal. Yet there is also a sea change in the make up of the grid coming, as a more diverse group of riders are coming through. Sam Lowes has finally come good on the Speed Up, now that the team has finally abandoned its carbon fibre swing arm. Danny Kent has figured out what it takes to win a championship, and is dominating. Johann Zarco has found his feet in the Ajo Moto2 team, and has taken charge of that class. Valentino Rossi is back to form, and Ducati have a competitive machine.

The most interesting development is that the Spanish championship is finally turning into a stepping stone for many nationalities. After winning the CEV Moto3 title for the past two seasons, Fabio Quartararo is living up to expectations, and perhaps even exceeding them. Hiroki Ono used his year in the CEV to get a foothold in the Kiefer Leopard time alongside Danny Kent. Spaniard Joan Mir dominated the first CEV Moto3 race of 2015, but Italian Niccolo Bulega and Dutch rider Bo Bendsneyder made a big impression. There were only six Spanish riders in the top fifteen at Portimao. Spanish journalists are expressing their concern that the express route for fast young Spanish riders is closing down. While that is bad news for Spain, it is good news for the series. This is supposed to be a motorcycle racing world championship. After a long period of Spanish domination, it is starting to look like one again.

SBK

ACERBIS ITALIAN ROUND

IMOLA · MAY 10th · RND 5 of 13

Race one winner: Jonathan Rea, Kawasaki
Race two winner: Jonathan Rea, Kawasaki

ON A ROLL

Blogs by Matthew Roberts & Graeme Brown
Photos by Kawasaki/GeeBee/Ducati Corse Press/Milagro/Suzuki Racing

Round five of the World Superbike Championship may not have been a classic by the high standards set at Imola over the past decade or so since Troy Bayliss and Colin Edwards went fairing-to-fairing in a battle for the ages back in 2002, but the action last Sunday was charged with all of the emotion and passion we have come to associate with a circuit soaked in Italian racing ardor.

It is no secret that onsite attendances have fallen at WSBK events around the world in recent seasons but as the global economy slowly recovers and the manufacturers breathe new life into the sports bike market, it seems that Superbikes are capturing the imagination of the public once more. At Imola the grandstands were buzzing again with 65,000 fans over the course of the weekend, many turning out to see the revival of Ducati as a competitive force - especially with Davide Giugliano returning from his long injury lay-off - whilst others were keen to witness for themselves the sight of Jonathan Rea in perfect harmony with the Kawasaki ZX-10R.

Giugliano's return from three months out with a broken back promises to be the stuff of local legend after he wrestled the Panigale to an eye-watering Superpole on Saturday – only the fourth of his career. The liberties taken by the Roman on the way to that lap, not to mention a lack of race fitness, suggested that his challenge would fade on Sunday but a charge to the podium in race one was followed by a highly-creditable ride to fourth in race two, when surely all he wanted to do was lie in a bath of gelato for a week.

Emotions ran even higher in the World Supersport race, which was contested by Kenan Sofuoglu despite the fact that his seven-week-old baby boy Hamza lay critically ill in a hospital in Istanbul. Sofuoglu revealed that he only made a late decision to travel to Italy after being persuaded by his wife and her father to leave his son's side, as he battles to recover from bleeding on his brain. On Sunday the three-time champion produced arguably the ride of his long career, turning out lap record after lap record to hold off the challenge of title rival and polesetter Jules Cluzel, in a dazzling display of talent and mutual respect that diffused simmering tension between the feuding pair.

The lap records fell in World Superbikes too as Jonathan Rea claimed his second consecutive Imola double to extend his record so far this season to eight wins and two second places from ten races. Rea's form represents the second best ever start to a World Superbike campaign (Neil Hodgson took nine wins and a second from the first five rounds of 2003) and confirmed, if there was still any doubt, that his transition from Honda to the Kawasaki is complete and comprehensive. His victories so far have come at every kind of circuit and with Chaz Davies suffering technical DNF's in both races on the Ducati and Leon Haslam crashing his Aprilia in race 2, Rea now holds an 87-point advantage at the top. Remarkably, with 16 races still to go this season he can already afford to finish second in all of them and still claim the title.

The thing that will keep Superbike fans switched on to the series this season regardless of Rea's dominance, though, is the humility and humour of the Northern Irishman. After launching his gloves into the adoring crowd following a race two victory that he would later struggle to find the words to describe, it was clear that Jonathan shares their passion for racing and they responded accordingly. His love for this sport is genuine, as is his appreciation for his current position as a factory rider on a competitive package, and his Twitter account is a stream of testament to his gratitude and excitement. It is the way us ordinary fans like to think we would feel and behave if we were in his position.

Rea dedicated his results at Imola to Joan Lascorz, who was paralysed in a testing accident for Kawasaki at the circuit in 2012, and used his Twitter account to show support for Sofuoglu with the hashtag #PrayforHamza. These are not necessarily extraordinary gestures, but they show Rea to be an ordinary person. If he can go on to win the title this season then he really will be – in his words - #livingthedream for all of us.

SBK BLOG

HELPING HANDS...

By Graeme Brown

After five rounds of the scheduled thirteen in the 2015 FIM Superbike World Championship the green army marches on. I am sure that absolutely no one could have predicted the domination with which Kawasaki and in particular Jonathan Rea has exercised over the championship thus far. It leaves the rest of the paddock scratching their heads wondering what they can do to catch up.

The change to the technical regulations for 2015 has done little to level the playing field between the 'factory' teams and the rest and indeed on current showing only seems to have widened the gap. The WSBK paddock is currently running a two-tier system where the main manufacturer teams are way ahead of the rest of the pack.

Last year FIM technical delegate Scott Smart explained that the changes to the regulations would make it cheaper for the non-factory teams to access the same electronics equipment and close the difference in performance so that private teams and wildcard riders could reasonably expect to have a degree of parity in their potential.

Having all the gear is one thing but if you don't have the rider, the technicians or the knowledge then it is pretty worthless. One team technician lamented the fact that there is a bit of a spending war going on at the moment but not with trick parts but acquiring the knowledge to make the machines perform at their maximum. You can have an 8000 euro ECU from the factory squad but you need to pay someone 100,000 and more to make it work.

At the moment it looks as though the teams that have the biggest input directly from their manufacturers, namely Kawasaki, Aprilia and Ducati are competing against each other whilst Honda, Suzuki, MV and BMW are fighting it out with the privateers.

The Suzuki squad is still struggling to get to grips with the Magneti Marelli system that the MotoGP team is using and it seems that there is little or no direct input from Japan or Italy at this time. It's a similar picture at Ten Kate where the Dutch have been ploughing their lone furrow on behalf of Honda since 2003.

We don't know what impact the 2008 financial crisis would have had on the Superbike Championship but for me it goes back to 2002 when the Flammini brothers Paolo and Maurizio tore the existing rule book up and made their own regulations against the wishes and advice of the MSMA – the group that represents the manufacturers.

In that moment HRC withdrew support for the WSBK series. The other three main Japanese brands followed suit. Whilst Kawasaki are now running an effort fully backed by parent company KHI, both Honda and Suzuki's programmes are directed by the European distributor and Yamaha have come and gone to promote a particular variant of the R1 at that time.

The way the technical regulations have now been drawn up it would seem that without the direct involvement and budget from Japan they will continue to play catch up.

On a sad note we learned on Friday of the plight of Kenan Sofuoglu's seven week old son Hamza, who took ill last week. Kenan is one of a rare breed, an uncompromising competitor who never gives an inch to his rivals on track but off the bike is a very generous, kind hearted man. I, along with everyone in the paddock wish that young Hamza has that same fighting spirit and makes a full recovery. Our thoughts and best wishes go out to Kenan, his wife Julia, young Hamza and their wider families.

Torres celebrates third place on the Aprilia while team-mate Leon Haslam cracked three ribs after his highside in the second race...

Giugliano made the noisy Imola circuit ring even louder with an emotional comeback to the podium. “The races were not easy but on a personal level this was like a win for me,” he said of his Race1 third place

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HARD JOB SOMETIMES EH ROLAND? DUCATI'S 1299 PANIGALE AND THE FRESH MULTISTRADA 1200 CAME ALONG AT A CHOICE TIME FOR A LITTLE CHECK ON HOW THE ITALIANS ARE MOVING WITH TWO OF THEIR SIGNATURE V-TWIN MODELS

DUCATI DOUBLE

By Roland Brown, Photos by Milagro

DUCATI
1299 PANIGALE

Ducati's V-twins have come a long way since the 851 sportster began the liquid-cooled desmodromic line back in 1988, and this year the Italian marque takes a further step in two contrasting directions. While the 1299 Panigale brings twin-cylinder performance to new heights with a staggering maximum output of 205bhp, the Multistrada 1200 combines increased, 160bhp output with the innovation of variable valve timing.

Of the two it's the 1299 Panigale that has been making more headlines, and for all the right reasons. Of this year's brilliant crop of new super-sports bikes, Ducati's contender has the most impressive vital statistics of all. Despite having only two cylinders the 1285cc desmo lump is a few horsepower up on its four-cylinder rivals, and at just 190kg the 1299 is also the lightest of the bunch.

The subtly restyled Ducati is visually stunning, whether in standard form or as the Panigale S, with lighter forged wheels plus uprated electronics and suspension. And as well as being 10bhp more powerful than the outgoing 1199 Panigale it has been made more rider-friendly. Its screen is slightly taller, its mirrors wider, its seat redesigned to improve comfort.
Most importantly, the bigger-bore engine generates 15 per cent more torque through the midrange, restoring the grunt that was lacking in the 1199 Panigale and making the Ducati easier as well as faster to ride. Its electronics are also updated, with a more sophisticated traction control and the addition of adjustable wheelie control plus a quick-shifter that allows clutchless changes both up and down through the box.

Chassis design remains based on an aluminium monocoque that uses the engine as a stressed member. The 1299 has slightly steeper steering geometry, which aids agility, and a lower pivot for its single-sided swingarm, which helps rear tyre grip. The Panigale S chassis also features Öhlins semi-active suspension, linked to the riding modes and tuneable via a button on the bars.

The Ducati steers superbly, and its ability to firm its front forks' damping under braking and stiffen the rear shock under acceleration allows softer damping at other times, boosting cornering control and improving comfort at a steady speed. Its firm damping under braking is welcome because the Panigale has brilliant brakes: immensely powerful Brembo radial Monobloc calipers, matched with Bosch's cornering ABS system.

Even so, like any racy superbike the Ducati requires setting-up to suit rider and circuit. On the launch at Portimao in Portugal it shook its head exiting some bends until its suspension was stiffened to suit my weight, after which it cornered with phenomenal control and stability. It's right up there fighting Aprilia's RSV4, BMW's S1000RR and Yamaha's YZF-R1 for the title of 2015's fastest superbike.

The 1299 Panigale S is also an improvement on the 1199 in handling, safety and ease of use, while improving slightly in comfort and retaining the model's familiar assets of beauty and V-twin charm. It's expensive (over £20,000 in the UK) but sublime; one of the best Ducatis since the 851 began the eight-valve line all those years ago.

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The Multistrada 1200 is also significantly updated, gaining its biggest revamp since the original model arrived in 2010 to give adventure class motorcycling a new dimension. Both the standard Multi and higher specification 1200S feature new bodywork and increased 160bhp output but the 1198cc V-twin engine's big news is DVT, or Desmodromic Variable Timing, its innovative variable-valve timing system.

This features adjustable camshafts, operated via oil pressure, which allow the valve timing to be optimised for both high- and low-rev running. Response at low revs is smoother, especially below 3000rpm. Straight-line performance is stronger and more flexible than ever, although under hard acceleration there's some vibration through the seat, which is roomier, lower and height-adjustable for the first time.

The Multistrada's familiar beaky styling and upright riding position remain, but the half-fairing is wider and the look is enhanced by an angled array of headlights. One beam on each side is a cornering light that illuminates in bends, triggered by the new lean-angle sensor that allows uprated traction control and a new anti-wheelie function. The traction control is effective but was probably responsible for an occasional hesitation during the launch ride. Given more time this should be sortable with fine-tuning.

Other updates include the Multistrada 1200S's Skyhook semi-active suspension system, which is now governed by the lean-angle sensor. The Multi's generous suspension travel allows a very compliant ride, becoming firmer when needed – notably under hard use of the outstanding brake system, which features Brembo Monobloc calipers and, like the 1299, Bosch's brilliant cornering ABS system.

Useful updates elsewhere include extra steering lock, increased ground clearance and a slimmer fuel tank with unchanged 20-litre capacity. The revamped Multistrada has a couple of slightly rough edges, and like the Panigale it faces hot competition, in this case from BMW's new S1000XR and KTM's outstanding 1290 Super Adventure. But it's in good shape to meet the challenge: more powerful, more refined and more versatile than ever before.

DUCATI

DUCATI

Celium

Airmatic

Simi

100%

100% continue to diversify, and aside from superb goggles and catchy eyewear then their gloves are also worth a look. The Celium is lightweight and flexible and comes in five different colours/designs – even if the realistic 'skin' shade is a bit freaky! It boasts features like Creora finger gussets that help with mobility of the digit and wick away moisture. The gloves moves through a small range of detail in terms of what they offer with models like Ride Fit and Airmatic heading up to the Simi which is more technically advanced with assets like Poron padding for protection on the upper hand.

As figurehead and lead creative Marc Blanchard commented in OTOR recently 100% goggle owners can sync up their motorsports eyewear with the gloves and the relatively simple approach to design means that they are as catchy as they are useful for whatever type of riding.

www.ride100percent.com/motorsports/gloves

ALPINESTARS

More quality items from Alpinestars and for the committed road bike user. The Motegi Perforated Leather Jacket should cost around 750 euros (one hundred less in pounds) and offers what you'd expect from a high-performing and engineered multi panel garment. DFC (Dynamic Flow Control) inlets on the shoulders spread air through the jacket and these are adjustable – handy as the temperatures in Europe slowly rise. The Motegi comes with shoulder and elbow protection and customizable elements as well as a host of other details that help justify the price and make it the only every day riding jacket you'll need.

Carrying more clobber will be possible thanks to the Tech Aero Backpack. It is made from advance poly-fabric so it is light, tough and resistant. It boasts a quick release system and is expandable from 16 to 26 litres – with laptop pocket. It has a waterproof, fleece-lined top pocke with a top hard shell. Count on a built-in helmet carrier and enveloping rain cover as well. The form of the rucksack means it will fit with the Bionic back protector. Alpinestars also claim it has a "pocket, loophole and conduit enables integration of hydro pack (as accessory upgrade), meaning this pack is ideal for long distances." Expect to pay around 140 euros or 130 pounds.

www.alpinestars.com

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FOX girls
By Ray Archer

FOX

'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focussed on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP.
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